Priorities for wildlife and forests

943. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Indian Board of Wildlife, at its meeting after a gap of four years, has recommended priority sector States for wildlife and forests;

(b) whether it has recommended lifting of ban on recruitment to clear the way to fill 2000 vacant posts and introduction of reforms, providing more investment and greater priority to this sector; and

(c) if so. what are the details of this new policy and the action plan in that regard?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) The Indian Board for Wild Life in its meeting held on 21st January, 2002 recommended and that wild life and forestry should be declared as priority sector at the National level.

(b) and (c) Yes Sir. The details of the wild life conservation strategy adopted by Indian Board of Wild Life are given in the Statement enclosed.

Regarding Priorities for Wildlife and Forests

The details of the wildlife conservation strategy adopted by the Indian Board for Wildlife are:—

1. Wildlife and forests shall be declared priority sector at the national level for which funds should be earmarked.
2. Law enforcement agencies must ensure that those engaged in poaching, illicit trade in wildlife and wildlife products, destruction of their habitat, and such other illegal activities arc given quick and deterrent punishment.
3. We should fully tap the potential in wildlife tourism and at the same time take care that it does not have adverse impact

in wildlife and protected areas. The revenue earned from increased tourism should be used entirely to augment available resources for conservation.

4. Protecting interests of the poor and tribals living around protected areas should be handled with sensitivity and with maximum participation of the affected people. They should have access to the minor forest produce, in the forest outside of national parks and sanctuaries. Employment and means generation for these people is crucial for maintaining symbiosis between the forests, wildlife and the people. People should be encouraged to take up afforestation and conservation in new areas.

5. While strengthening protective measures against traditional threats to wildlife, we should also respond to newer threats such as toxic chemicals and pesticides.

6. There should be greater governmental as well as societal recognition and support for the many non-governmental organizations engaged in wildlife conservation. Mainstream media to better highlight their activities as also successes of governmental initiative that have worked.

7. Creatively produced Television Programmes on wildlife and ecology are widely appreciated by young and old as seen from the popularity of dedicated T.V. channels like. Discovery, National Geographic and Animal Plant. It proposed that Prasar Bharati and other private channels alongwith with agencies like WWF for Nature should collaborate and increase original Indian content in different languages on our television.

8. No diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes for critical and ecologically fragile wildlife habitat shall' be allowed.

9. Lands falling within 10 km. of the boundaries of National Parks and Sanctuaries should be notified as Eco-fragilc zones under section 3(v) of the Environment (Protection)

Act and Rule 5 sub-rule S(viii) & (x) of the Environment (Protection) Rules.

10. Removal of encroachments and illegal activities from within forest lands and Protected Areas.

11. No commercial monoculture to replace natural forests.

12. The settlement of rights in National Parks and Sancturies should not be used to exclude or reduce the areas that are crucial and integral part of the wildlife habitat.

13. More than 2000 vacant posts in the frontline staff of Protected Areas shall be filled immediately and provided basic infrastructure for efficient discharge of duties. Ban on recruitment of staff against vacant post should be lifted on lines with the Police Department. Innovative initiative such as redeployment of surplus employees in other departments, hiring local people on voluntary or honorarium basis, raising donations from business houses and other members of the public in return for a greater role for them in implementing programmes need to be explored.

14. Every protected area should be managed by forest officers trained in wildlife management.

15. Mitigation measures for human-animal conflict and mechanism for crop insurance, as also expeditious disbursements of ex-gratia payment should be instituted by States.

16. Forest Commission should be set-up to look into restructuring, reform and strengthening the entire forest set up and affiliated institutions in the country.

17. A working group shall be constituted to monitor implementation of Wildlife Action Plan.